

## ***KBSNA sessions to be held at AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Washington, November 19-20***

### **MEMBERSHIP IN THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY**

Readers of the Newsletter (and anyone else who is interested) are invited to join the Karl Barth Society of North America.

To become a member of the Barth Society, send your name, address, and **annual dues of \$10.00** to:

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*Members whose dues were paid prior to October 1992 are urged to send in their annual renewal.*

### **A preview of Garrett Green's paper**

#### **Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion**

In a paper to be presented on November 20, Garrett Green will argue for the inclusion of Barth's theory of religion in the canon of modern religious studies.

Earlier generations of scholars, confident that they could distinguish "objective" or "descriptive" treatments of religion from those that are "biased" or "confessional," established a canon of received theories of religion, in which liberal theologians (like Tillich) were welcome but from which more orthodox theologians (like Barth) were excluded.

Today, when most scholars stress the theory-laden nature of all description and the social location of all theories, no credible argument remains for teaching Durkheim, Freud, or Eliade on religion while ignoring Barth and others who speak on the basis of an explicit religious commitment.

Green will analyze Barth's theory of religion, with particular attention to correcting widespread misinterpretations of his views. The paper will also begin the task of interpreting Barth in the context of religious studies by comparing his views with those of theorists typically included in the religious studies "canon."

For the fifth successive year, the Karl Barth Society will sponsor a program prior to the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in November. This year's meeting will be held in Washington, D.C. Again this year the Barth Society program will include a second session on Saturday morning in addition to the Friday afternoon meeting.

The first session on Friday afternoon, November 19, will run from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. It will be held in the Kansas Room of the Sheraton Washington Hotel.

At 2:30 Walter Lowe (Emory University) will make a presentation on the topic "Barth and Kant: Thinking *Coram Deo*." Walt's presentation will treat a number of arguments from his book *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason*, which was recently published by Indiana University Press.

At 4:00 W. Stacy Johnson (Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary) will speak on "Karl Barth's Ethics of Grace Alone: The Witness of the Spirit in the Christian Life." Stacy will be filling the "younger scholar" slot suggested last year.

The Saturday morning session on November 20, also in the Kansas Room of the Sheraton Washington, will begin at 9:00 with a presentation by Garrett Green (Connecticut College), on "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth on Religion."

The rest of the time on Saturday morning (10:30 to 12:00) will be devoted to open discussion of current research and other interests that anyone wishes to raise.

### A preview of Stacy Johnson's paper

#### **Karl Barth's Ethics of Grace Alone: The Witness of the Spirit in the Christian Life**

The paper to be given by Stacy Johnson on November 19 is intended to continue the theme of the past two years at the pre-AAR meetings. It will concentrate on the centrality of ethics to Barth's work as a whole, and on what Johnson sees as his anti-foundationalist approach to the Holy Spirit and the Christian life.

Johnson is currently working on a book exploring an anti-foundationalist reading of Barth's overall work, focusing on the constant interplay between "realism" and "idealism" in his theology and the important clue provided by Barth's 1929 Dortmund lecture, "Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie."

Johnson points out that the only interpreter of Barth who has laid great emphasis on the Dortmund lecture is T. F. Torrance, but Torrance reads it as an endorsement of realism, by which he seems to mean objectivism.

Johnson argues that Barth is satisfied with neither realism nor idealism as a final resting place for theology, nor is he prepared to forge some new synthesis. Barth accepts no fixed and unrevisable basis for theology.

Noticing the interplay between realism and idealism, Johnson suggests, may help explain why, in the secondary literature on Barth's ethics, he is read either as a realist (Dalferth, Matheny) or an idealist (Rendtorff, Macken). But in the light of the interplay, Johnson thinks, Barth intends to be neither realist nor idealist but something else altogether. Ethics seems to be the key inquiry by which Barth pushes beyond (or at least seeks to dwell within) this interplay.

To test this hypothesis, Johnson will explore another key interplay, that between "presupposition" and "consequence," or thought and act. In this light, he considers Frei's assertion that Barth was primarily about the business of "conceptual redescription" to be only half right.

Asserting that one must attend more deliberately to Barth's ethics in order to get at what he was after, Johnson sees ethics as the pinnacle of Barth's theology, not just ancillary. In keeping with his neo-Reformation commitment, knowledge of God for Barth comes to fruition in obedience. In keeping with his indebtedness to the Enlightenment, and especially to Kant, Barth is concerned with the possibility of genuinely free action. Yet in contrast to both the Reformation and the Enlightenment (but in keeping with Kant), this possibility is not a "given." Instead Barth emphasizes the radical ambiguity of human life and does not think in terms of any sort of "essence" of human existence. Theology and ethics are about a radical upsetting of the balance.

Johnson suggests that these issues work themselves out practically in Barth's theology of the Holy Spirit, especially his somewhat cryptic notion of "ec-centric" existence in *C.D.* IV, and the way he relates reality and possibility, justification and sanctification, gospel and law, love of God and of neighbor, etc.

The paper grows out of but, says Johnson, moves substantially beyond his 1992 Harvard dissertation with Richard Niebuhr, Gordon Kaufman, and Ronald Thiemann.

### **KBSNA conference on Barth and Luther held in Toronto in June**

Approximately 50 persons attended the second of the new series of annual Barth Society conferences held at the University of Toronto June 18-19, 1993. The overall theme of the conference was "Barth and Luther."

#### **Barth and Calvin**

The opening presentation on Friday morning was by William Klempa (McGill University) on "Barth's Encounter and Conversations with Calvin and also with Luther." The early Barth, said Klempa, had drawn closer to the Lutherans and was not comfortable with the Reformed designation. But he later discovered that he was more Reformed than he had thought, a discovery which was probably stimulated by the presence of Emmanuel Hirsch on the faculty!

While it has been suggested that Barth's theology was heavily influenced by the orthodox Reformed dogmatists, Klempa noted that no Reformed scholastic is quoted in the Göttingen Dogmatics as often as Luther or Calvin.

The bulk of Klempa's paper was a comparative analysis of Barth and Calvin on the doctrine of election.

In conclusion, he pointed out that Barth regarded both Luther and Calvin as incomparable teachers, and noted that there are 297 Calvin citations and 320 Luther citations in the *Church Dogmatics*.

#### **Luther and Barth as biblical interpreters**

On Friday afternoon, David Demson (Emmanuel College, Toronto) lectured on "Luther and Barth: Ways of Reading the Bible." Demson attempted a comparison of their interpretative procedure by looking at Barth's discussion of Genesis 10-11 and Acts 2 (*C.D.* III/4) and then at Luther's interpretation of Scripture in terms of a threefold scheme: Genesis 1-11 as the first world, Genesis 12 through the rest of the OT as the middle world, and then the NT to the final coming of Christ as the end of all things. He suggested a contrast between Luther's episodic emphasis, with its focus on the way faith struggles with ungodliness, and Barth's "total plot" emphasis, which is primarily concerned with what God is doing. [continued]



### Osborn and McGlasson books reviewed

The late afternoon program featured a lively exchange between Robert Osborn (Duke University) and Paul McGlasson (Eden Seminary) reviewing each other's recent books.

McGlasson attacked Osborn's *The Barmen Declaration as a Paradigm for a Theology of the American Church* as an expression of liberation theology, which he regards as false doctrine. He argued that the later Barth is himself to blame for this defection from the gospel, since after World War II he abandoned his position as a confessing theologian, embracing instead a countercultural neo-Marxist ideology that twists and distorts the Word of God. In place of Scripture alone, McGlasson contended, Barth's doctrine of the "little lights" in *C.D. IV/3* opens the door for a natural theology of good causes derived from the ideological left. Osborn responded that he could barely recognize his book in McGlasson's presentation.

Osborn's review of McGlasson's *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth*, began by pointing out that the subtitle reflects the actual content of the book better than the title (which was apparently added for marketing purposes).

He noted further that McGlasson's study of Barth's exegesis does not consider what Barth says about what he is doing, but deals only with examples of what he does. Within that limit, Osborn's assessment of the book was essentially positive.

A couple of noteworthy points:

For Barth, the subject matter of the biblical text appears nowhere except *in* and *as* the text. It does not hover above the text, nor can it be distilled from it.

Barth's practice of exegesis is methodologically pluralistic. It does not reflect a single consistent method of interpretation. It emphasizes listening to the text in order to let the texts speak. For Barth, hermeneutics is a result of hearing the text, not a condition for doing so.

### Banquet address

At the Friday evening banquet, Harry McSorley (St. Michael's College, Toronto) spoke on "An Ecumenical Reception of Luther." McSorley, a noted Catholic Luther scholar, sought to move Luther interpretation in the direction of a rapprochement between Rome and the Reformation.

### Law and Gospel, 2 kingdoms, sacraments

On Saturday morning, David Yeago (Lutheran Southern Seminary) led a discussion of "The Early Barth's Attitude to Luther's Understanding of Law and Gospel, the Theory of the Two Kingdoms, and the Sacraments." The discussion was based on two readings: "Basic Problems of Christian Social Ethics: A Discussion with Paul Althaus," which was Barth's review of a book by Althaus in a Religious Socialist journal in 1922, and a 1923 paper by Barth on "Luther's Doctrine of the Eucharist: Its Basis and Purpose."

In looking at Barth's early work in order to understand his attitude toward Luther, Yeago pointed out that Barth's relation to Luther was bound up with his difficult relations with the Lutherans. The review of the Althaus book was Barth's first literary engagement with self-conscious Lutheranism. Yeago noted that the reference in this essay to "the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms" is the first appearance of that now famous phrase, coined by Karl Barth. Yeago doubts that Luther himself has what could be called a two kingdoms doctrine, given his flexible way of talking about the matter. Lutherans, said Yeago, are too much under the spell of Althaus's reading of Luther. Barth's critique of 1920s German Lutheranism on this issue prefigures the position he would set forth in the Barmen Declaration in 1934 when the stakes were much higher.

The other article, which Yeago characterized as "an excellent piece of Luther interpretation," refutes in advance the Bultmannian existentialist reading of Luther (derived from Ebeling et al.) which Yeago sees as dominant in American Lutheranism.

In the editor's judgment, this session was one of the highlights of the conference.

### Human agency in Luther and Barth

The final presentation was John Webster's paper on human agency in Luther and Barth, a summary of which appears below.

*Editor's Note: The following is Prof. Webster's summary of the paper he presented at the KBSNA Conference in Toronto on June 20, 1993.*

## The Grammar of Doing: Luther and Barth on Human Agency

John Webster

Wycliffe College

University of Toronto

One way of articulating the distinction between Luther and Barth would be to say that they have divergent moral ontologies. Luther and Barth differ, that is, in their understanding of the moral field, of the space in which human beings act. Whilst both would assert that human moral action takes place within an order of being which precedes and determines human agency, their understandings of that moral order differ in significant respects. In particular, Luther's use of 'faith' as the governing rubric for human action contrasts with Barth's use of 'invocation of God' as a similar summary conception for the Christian life. These differing conceptions signal differing accounts of the way in which divine action grounds and evokes human action. The contrast can be traced by comparing Luther's 1520 *Treatise on Good Works* with Barth's posthumously published lectures on the ethics of reconciliation, *The Christian Life*. [1] *[continued]*

Before drawing attention to the divergence, however, points of commonality between Luther's and Barth's moral ontologies need to be noted. Both Luther and Barth are concerned at the beginning of their texts to identify a specifically Christian sense of human moral agency, and to distinguish what they have to say from 'self-evident' or 'natural' construals of what it is to be a human moral agent.

For Luther, the need for such specification arises out of inherited discussions of good works, whose 'trickery and deception' is such that they merely reinforce illusion and enslavement. Much of his treatise, accordingly, is taken up with exposing some of these errors: a relationship of consequence between good works and forgiveness and acceptance by God; a higher evaluation of 'religious' works as more meritorious in the eyes of God; a reversal of the proper ordering of faith and work.

Barth, similarly, sees himself, in part at least, as engaged in an exercise in correction, correction above all of the assumption that ideas of good human action are as it were common stock, from which Christian theology also draws. For Barth, any notion of a *sensus communis moralis* is nothing other than an attempt to bracket the credo.

This specificity is underscored in both writers by the language of divine command. Both texts define good works not by reference to such works as the agent's project but by reference to the command of God. Luther puts it thus:

'...there are no good works except those works which God has commanded... Accordingly, we have to learn to recognise good works from the commandments of God, and not from the appearance, size, or number of the works themselves, nor from the opinion of men or of human law or custom...[2]

What focusses Christian ethics, what gives it its Christianness, is its orientation to the command of God (above all, as Luther's text proceeds, to the first commandment). Barth makes much the same point:

At issue is the relation of human action to God's command. God himself, God alone is good, and he decides what human action may be called good or not good. As the Word of God in general is the speaking of the living God, so the command of God in particular is his commanding. Special ethics has to point to the concrete meaning of his commanding and the willing, choosing, and acting that corresponds to it or contradicts it.[3]

In both cases, of course, the language of command is best understood not as simply about heteronomy but as about focus or positivity, as about the specific character accorded to Christian ethics by virtue of its orientation to a personal divine reality which at once transcends and evokes the agency of the human person.

This in turn leads to a particular account of the grounds, place and status of human action:

...our works cease and...God alone works in us...[4]

God is the giver and man the recipient. Man is an active, not an inactive recipient, yet even in his activity he is still a recipient... (T)he decisive point is that God directs, demands, orders, and commands, while man can only exercise his responsibility only by obeying God's command.[5]

Both Luther and Barth are fiercely opposed to any notion of the human self as a self-realising agent. Their ontology of human action excludes any idea that human acts are fundamentally determinative of the agent. Both define good human action in ways which distinguish it sharply from the operations of the busy, acquisitive, anxious worker of merit; both see growth into good human action as intimately connected with the agent's trustful submission to the action of God.

Nevertheless, at this point their respective accounts diverge. Luther speaks of human action as wholly enclosed within (even, perhaps, supplanted by) divine action; Barth speaks more readily of different agencies, divine and human, in which the secondary (human) agent is both receptive to and in correspondence to, but not absorbed by, the primary (divine) agent. This is not to make the -- drastically oversimplified -- claim that Luther stresses passivity and Barth stresses activity. Perhaps more accurate, but still too unnuanced, would be something like this: for Luther, even in action one is utterly passive, that upon which another acts; for Barth, even in receiving one is a spontaneous doer, acting in correspondence to the action of the one whose act is received.

The point at which the divergence can be traced most helpfully is in the differing accounts which Luther and Barth offer of the definitive 'moment' of the Christian life, of that which is most characteristic of the good life. Luther puts it thus: 'The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ... (I)n this work all good works exist, and from faith these works receive a borrowed goodness.'[6]

Barth, by contrast, having reviewed a number of possible leading motifs for the Christian life settles on prayer as its characteristic activity:

We are speaking of the humble and resolute, the frightened and joyful invocation of the gracious God in gratitude, praise, and above all petition. In the sphere of the covenant, this is the normal action corresponding to the fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ. In it man in his whole humanity takes his proper place over against God. In it he does the central thing that precedes, accompanies, and follows all else he does...[7]

## II

Luther severs the bond between good works and the self-realization of the agent. This is what lies at the heart of the repeated affirmation in the *Treatise on Good Works* that faith is the core of good works: 'faith alone makes all other works good, acceptable, and worthy because it trusts God and never



doubts that everything a man does in faith is well done in God's sight';[8] or, more tersely, 'faith must be the foreman behind this work. Without faith no one is able to do this work. In fact, all works are entirely comprised in faith.'[9] What does Luther mean here?

Faith, first of all, is internal to the definition of good works, which are, accordingly, 'entirely comprised in faith'. Faith, that is, ought not to be viewed as a supplementary condition for the acceptance of good works, works which could in principle be performed *extra fide* but only become acceptable when performed in faith. Faith is not only the originating impulse and the sustaining ambience of moral good; it is an immanent element in goodness, not a second activity as it were running alongside 'good' works. Faith is internal to the definition of the goodness of good works because faith is that orientation to the action of God within which alone good works are possible. Thus faith, and works done in faith, are wholly oriented to the fulfilling of the first commandment. '(T)his faith, this trust, this confidence from the heart's core is the true fulfilling of the first commandment.'[10] Faith is correlative to the first commandment since the first commandment establishes the aseity, the absolute primacy and the sheer gratuity of divine action: at the beginning of the decalogue stands the divine self-definition and its radically exclusive demand.

How does the primacy of faith shape Luther's moral ontology? Most obviously, it leads to an emphasis that the human person is primarily an ontological *passivum* and only secondarily or consequentially an agent. What matters, that is, is 'the highest and first work of God', to which there corresponds the 'letting go' or 'cessation' of our own works. Luther is seeking to establish a reversal of the relation of doing and being in the ontology of the human person.

At one level, of course, Luther considers persons to be inescapably involved in action. But Luther is seriously hostile to the idea that agents achieve selfhood through activity. Luther's doctrine of justification by grace through faith severs the bond between acceptance and self-realization which he found in scholastic anthropology; in effect, his moral ontology calls into question the notion that self-conscious, self-actualising selfhood is anthropologically primary. Indeed, in a crucial phrase he notes how in good works as traditionally understood (i.e., as 'religious' works), 'the self has been set up as an idol'. [11] He acutely sees that religious works, and the understanding of the human person through which their significance is expounded, have become an exercise in self-preservation; good works are in league with human egotism, and their consequence is accordingly the deepening of human depravity and not release from it.

There is a further ramification here for Luther's moral ontology. In an important sense, goodness is not to be attributed to the agent understood as a substantial self. Implicit within Luther's entire discussion of good works in the treatise is a hesitation about the sense in which the self is allowed to

be considered a centre of attribution. In his very fine study *Ontologie der Person bei Luther*, Wilfried Joest proposes that Luther understands human persons 'eccentrically' or 'enclitically'. [12] Joest argues that Luther stands in sharp contrast to the Aristotelian substance ontology which had found its way into scholastic anthropology, and proposes that from the lectures on the Psalms onwards Luther has what he calls 'an antisubstantial interpretation of the being of humanity *coram Deo*'. [13] Rather than organising his anthropology around the twin notions of 'inseity' and 'subjectivity' (i.e., the self considered as 'the possessor of attributes'), [14] Luther appears to argue that positive spiritual predicates are properly attributed not to selves but to God as the author or human selfhood.

Luther, then, sums up the relation of good works to the first commandment by saying 'it is by the mercy and grace of God and not by their own nature that works are without guilt and are forgiven. They are good because of faith, which abandons itself to this same mercy'. [15] The 'goodness' of human action is thus received *ab extra*; like justification and sanctification, it is 'alien'. And one consequence of this idea of the 'alien' character of the goodness of good works is that the prime agent in good works is God himself: once again, 'God alone works in us'. [16]

This is why for Luther good works are characterised also by a proper confidence, by the certainty of faith. The agent's test of the goodness of a good work is this: 'If he finds his heart confident that it pleases God, then the work is good'. [17] Confidence is the indicator of that absence of selfconcern which is the fruit of faith in God. The *Treatise on Good Works* has much to say of confidence, especially in the earlier sections. In this, it draws attention to another important aspect of Luther's moral ontology. Running parallel to Luther's rejection of substance anthropology and his unease about positive spiritual predication in respect of human subjects, is his reshaping of the theology of conscience.

In speaking of confidence as characteristic of good works, Luther is partly making a familiar point that a good conscience is the ground of, not the reward for or consequence of, good action. But there is a more subtle theme here also. As with questions of spiritual predication, so with the matter of conscience: the magnetic centre of the moral world is not the self but God, and faith becomes correspondingly elevated as the orientation of the self to that centre. As Baylor puts it in his study of conscience in the earlier work of Luther,

'it is faith which confers on the conscience the ability correctly to judge, as God judges, persons before actions and actions in the light of persons. Or, perhaps more accurately, faith is the power of the conscience to accept God's judgments about the person rather than those which the conscience arrives at naturally, or by inference from actions'. [18]

On this reading, the situation of the moral self is no longer one of the human will confronted by the law, with conscience presiding over the performance as accuser or (perhaps) excuser.



Rather, conscience, subsumed under faith, is displaced as the judge of acceptability, and relegated to a function of acknowledging the true judgment made by God.

In sum: Luther's appeal to the term 'faith' in his discussion of Christian action concentrates a number of features of his moral ontology, especially those concerned with the primacy of divine action and the reorientation of the acting subject and its self-consciousness in the light of that primacy.

One question, of course, hangs over the whole of Luther's discussion: if in good works we are referred to 'God alone' who 'works in us,' is there any sense in which we can talk of the spontaneity of the agent? It is with that question in mind that we turn to what Barth has to say of invocation of God as the 'the basic act of the Christian ethos.' [19]

### III

Barth's choice of invocation of God as the basic motif of the Christian's life-act can best be understood out of two primary moves which are basic to his ethics in the *Church Dogmatics* and which he rehearses again at the beginning of *The Christian Life*. First, the moral field is defined by reference to the person and activity of Jesus Christ, the one in whom humanity and divinity are brought together in a way which fulfills the covenant between God and his human creation. Second, this focus on the personal history of Jesus Christ means that the theme of Christian dogmatics and thus of Christian ethics, is not single but two-fold: 'God and man' as 'two subjects in genuine encounter.' [20] Particularly important in this regard is Barth's use of the language of partnership between God and the human agent, [21] a use which is closely related to the protest against Christomonism and divine sole causality so vigorously registered in the baptismal fragment. [22] From the beginning of the ethics of reconciliation, it is clear that Barth is seriously at odds with a theory of human action which would make what human beings do a mere extension, emanation, or even mediation of what God does: ethical docetism is ruled out of order, and the place of the acting person secured.

It is these principles which guide Barth when, early on in the ethics of reconciliation lectures, he reviews a number of possible leading motifs for the Christian life -- freedom, repentance, faith, thanksgiving, and faithfulness -- eventually (in the revision of the lecture texts) [23] settling upon 'invocation of God'.

The chosen motif best fulfills two particularly basic criteria which Barth has established for such a choice, criteria which themselves articulate the ordered mutuality of God and the human partner which is the overarching theme of the ethics of reconciliation. Invocation as the quintessentially human action is on the one hand 'one for which man finds himself empowered only by the free grace of God,' and on the other hand 'an authentically and specifically human action, willed and undertaken in a free human resolve... No less serious in his

place than God in his, man must be present and at work in it according to the measure of his human capacity.' [24]

The same two-fold theme resurfaces at many points in the lecture texts. Invocation of God is by no means a natural capacity or entitlement, but solely that for which Christians are authorised by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself 'founded calling on God the Father -- and made it binding on his people -- by doing it first himself and in so doing giving a prior example of what he demanded of them, or rather, demanding it of them by himself doing it. He took them up into the movement of his own prayer.' [25] The freedom of Christian people to call upon God is 'purely and simply the work and gift of the grace that is addressed to them and recognized by them.' [26]

Above all, invocation is wrought by the Holy Spirit: if there is fellowship, reciprocal relation, between God and God's people, its occurrence is to be attributed to the self-presentation of Jesus Christ. 'In the Holy Spirit God has dealings with these people in such a way that he cannot continue to act one-sidedly; he awakens and impels and enables them to receive him in return and makes their dealings with them the controlling element in their lives. In the Holy Spirit God comes together with these people in such a way that for all the ongoing distinction there arises fellowship, a common life, between him and them and them and him.' [27] What this means, then, is that invocation of God is attributable to the immediate self-bestowal of God in the Holy Spirit, and is at the same time the 'dynamic actualization' of our partnership in the covenant in which there occurs 'history, intercourse, and living dealings between (God) and themselves (sc. Christians).' [28] Invocation, as the characteristic act of the Christian ethos, is 'an integral part of the history of the covenant between God and men'; it concerns our 'free, spontaneous, and responsible cooperation in this history.' [29]

How does this compare with what Luther has to say? Luther also makes reference to prayer as a 'special exercise of faith,' [30] asking: 'Where now are those who desire to know and to do good works? Let them undertake first prayer alone and rightly exercise themselves in faith, and they will find that it is true...that there is no work like prayer.' [31] But for Luther, prayer is just that: an exercise of faith, to be understood most fundamentally not in terms of the spontaneity of the one who petitions but in terms of the one to whom petition is made. For Barth, on the other hand, prayer is not only about letting God work but also about that human act in which '(m)an in his whole humanity takes his proper place over against God.' [32] As such, prayer is, as Barth has already put the matter in an earlier treatment of prayer in the *Dogmatics*, 'the innermost centre of the covenant between God and man.' [33]

In sum: Barth's use of prayer as fundamental to the characterization of the Christian ethos highlights how he sees the Christian ethos as a history in which there is 'a divine permission and commanding and a responsive human

obeying'. [34] This in turn leads to some distinctive features of Barth's ontology of the moral self. All that has been said so far makes plain that Barth believes the description of the human actor in the moral field to be a significant theological task, and that in some important respects he is less anxious than Luther to deny the validity of positive spiritual predication of human persons. What Barth calls 'formed and contoured reference' to the ethical event includes reference to the human agent 'who acts in free responsibility in his relationship to...God.' [35] Of course, like Luther, Barth is eager to distance himself from the anxious, acquisitive moral self, busy about the task of self-maintenance: since all persons are what they are in Christ, self-maintenance is both superfluous and a resistance to grace. And, moreover, Barth has already argued that the moral situation is not to be construed as one in which agents have to bear responsibility for their own selfhood. 'Since God is for him, he is relieved from the post of being for himself by the One who alone can be actually and effectively for him.' [36] Nor is human moral selfhood to be considered a centre of discernment: this, too, is a form of self-bestowed permission in which the sinner tries to be 'himself the judge of good and evil and therefore to be like God.' [37]

#### IV

Where, then, is the difference between Luther and Barth most sharply to be discerned? Towards the close of his magisterial survey of Barth's engagement with Luther, Ebeling argues that a major divergence stems from Barth's insistence that 'the human person -- in correspondence to God -- is an agent, whose being is in activity.' [38] This anthropology, which Ebeling -- surely mistakenly -- identifies as continuous with that of Aristotle, the scholastics and the renaissance, is contrasted with the anthropology of Luther, who 'understands faith as God's work and thereby understands the human person as a recipient, characterised by a passivity which, thanks to God's creative activity, is fully alive.' [39] Consequently, Barth's 'taking up of ethics into dogmatics' leads to 'the conversion of dogmatics into ethics.' [40]

Such a contrast, I suggest, is too bold and lacking in nuance. The differences between Barth and Luther cannot be caught in a simple opposition of action and passion -- one can easily find statements from both which affirm that persons are at once patients and agents. It is, I believe, more helpful to characterise the difference between Luther and Barth roughly as follows.

For Luther in the *Treatise on Good Works*, the real enemy is the notion of merit accrued through moral performance. Against this background Luther describes the way in which the action of God sets aside the desperate drive to self-realization by a creative interruption of the self's activities in the work of justification in which, *sine actibus nostris*, we are made new. 'Good works' flow from the person who in this sense is an ontological *passivum*, and whose works are properly attributed

to the divine agent and only secondarily to the human self. Justification and faith define Luther's moral ontology as a counter-statement to any scheme privileging self-actualization through deeds.

For Barth, the real enemy is divine sole causality. It is against this background that in *The Christian Life* he explores his earlier insistence that the grace of God is 'teleological.' [41] Underlying Barth's exposition of the Lord's Prayer is an affirmation that God's gracious divine action both constitutes human persons as agents and furnishes a prototype to which human action corresponds and in which correspondence its goodness is found. Thereby Barth seeks to exclude sole causality on the part of either God or the human agent, proposing instead that the moral field is a diverse pattern of correspondences or analogies, of similarities and dissimilarities, between the actions of God and human actions.

Put sharply: for Luther, 'God acts, and we receive (and only then can begin to act). For Barth, where God acts, we are seen to act -- precisely in receiving.' [42]

1. M. Luther, 'Treatise on Good Works' in *Luther's Works* 44 (Fortress: Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 21-114 (cited as *TGW*); K. Barth, *The Christian Life* (Edinburgh; T & T Clark, 1981) (cited as *ChrL*).
2. *TGW*, p. 23.
3. *ChrL*, p. 4.
4. *TGW*, p. 73.
5. *ChrL*, p. 29.
6. *TGW*, pp. 23f.
7. *ChrL*, p. 43.
8. *TGW*, p. 26.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
10. *TGW*, p. 30.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
12. W. Joest, *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1967), pp. 233-74.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
15. *TGW*, pp. 37f.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 73. On this, see Joest, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
18. M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person. Conscience in Late Scholasticism and the Young Luther* (Brill, Leiden, 1977), p. 228.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
21. E.g. pp. 7, 20.
22. See, for example, *Church Dogmatics* IV/4 (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1969), pp. 18-22.
23. An older version used 'faithfulness': see *ChrL*, pp. 275-88.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
30. *TGW*, p. 58.



31. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
32. *ChrL*, p. 43.
33. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, p. 93.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
35. *ChrL*, p. 6. Cf. also III/4, pp. 24-30.
36. II/2, p. 597.
37. *Ibid.*
38. G. Ebeling, 'Karl Barths Ringen mit Luther' in *Lutherstudien* III (Tubingen: Mohr, 1985), p. 555.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 556.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 557.
41. II/2, p. 567.
42. E. Jüngel, 'Gospel and Law' in *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), p. 124.

## CORRESPONDENCE

The first part of my Modern Theology course this fall revolves around the question about how to use the idea of "religion" to elucidate Christianity, moving from Schleiermacher's *Speeches* to Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*. Looking for ways to show how the water from Schleiermacher's well suddenly tasted poisonous to Barth et al., I began to finger Brunner's *Die Mystik und das Wort*, wondering if I should translate some bits of it, and, lo! a Karl Barth

Society Newsletter [#5, March 1992] that I had wisely saved came fluttering out of it, bringing me your review of Brunner's book and Barth's review of Brunner. So that is what my students got to read, and I am just writing to thank you for producing that useful piece.

What strikes me with the most force this time around is how S. and B. can both be seen to be developing implications of Calvin's "pious mind" paragraph in *Institutes* I.2.2; and how S. means in the *Speeches* to be a radical critic of religion and anthropocentrism on the basis of his "higher realism" of feeling, his Infinite a reverently intuited-but-not-comprehended Other. B. admits that this could be a controlling intention of S.'s ("Concluding Unscientific Postscript on S.," 2nd question), but doubts it.

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I have two questions about Karl Barth that I would like to have clarified. I have often heard that when someone asked Barth to sum up his theology, he replied "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." I would like to know if he ever actually said that or if it is only one of those apocryphal stories. My second question is, did Barth ever say "I take the Bible too seriously to take it literally"?

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*[Editor's note: Can anyone provide the answers? Isn't the latter usually attributed Reinhold Niebuhr?]*

KARL BARTH SOCIETY NEWSLETTER  
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